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EFFECTS OF DANCE ON COGNITION AND DEPRESSION IN HEALTHY OLDER ADULTS

Aging is associated with declines in cognition and mental health that might be ameliorated by physical activity (PA). Dance integrates multiple physical, cognitive, and social elements, and might be an avenue for improving cognition and mood. A systematic review and meta-analysis, published in the March 2025 issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*®, examined the effects of formal and traditional dance on cognition, depression, and anxiety in older adults.

The authors conducted five database searches yielding 17 randomized control trials (RCT). The RCTs were included if participants were ≥60 years and healthy or living with mild cognitive impairment. The authors examined interventions of dance against any comparison group. Records were independently screened, and data were extracted by two reviewers. The authors performed random-effects models using robust variance estimation and tested individual treatment, study, and outcome level moderators using the approximate Hotelling-Zhang test.

A total of 17 RCTs were included in the systematic review, but 13 RCTs were covered in the meta-analysis that included 1,174 participants with a mean age of 70.7 years, and 66.3% were female. The overall effect of dance interventions on cognition was significant, yet small ($g = 0.27$; 95% CI: 0.05–0.50; $P = 0.022$), and the effect on depression was significant and nearly moderate ($g = 0.43$; 95% CI: 0.06–0.80; $P = 0.036$); only one RCT examined anxiety and was not included. No moderator variables significantly explained variation in the effects of dance on cognitive function or depression ($P > 0.05$).

The authors conclude that dance interventions can improve cognition and depression in older adults, but note additional research is needed regarding the effects of dance on anxiety and depression in older adults.

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